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ABSTRACT

No one has accomplished more for children's literature than the outstanding illustrator, Randolph Caldecott. Born in Chester, England, in 1846, Caldecott absorbed the sights and sounds of the countryside and stored them in his memory and sketchbook for future use. In spite of discouragement from his father, Caldecott pursued his artistic interests and went on to bring two outstanding attributes to picture book making. First, he had the gift and superb control of line, a quality basic to every other attribute of the picture book. Second, he could extend, enhance, and enliven the text with his drawings. Caldecott published his drawings in various London magazines, and, later, in the American "Harper's" magazine. Some of his greatest illustrations were for a selection of chapters by Washington Irving called "Old Christmas." Throughout Caldecott's brief life and extensive travels, he acquired many friends, young and old, who greatly admired and praised his works and talent. For more than 25 years, the Caldecott Award Medal has been presented in his honor for outstanding illustrations in picture books for children. (HTH)

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RANDOLPH CALDECOTT

James P. Edwards

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INTRODUCTION

With the emergence of great writers and artists in time past or present, no one has accomplished more for children and children's literature than has the outstanding illustrator, Randolph Caldecott. The Children's Catalog refers to his efforts in the following quotation: "Randolph Caldecott's Picture Books were made between 1878 and 1885, his skillful drawings reveal an abundance of fancy, spirited humour, and a gift of expression which make his work important not only among the early illustrators of children's books, but for all time."[1]

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[1] Rachel Shor, Editor, Children's Catalog, p. 80.

RANDOLPH CALDECOTT

The talented originator and innovator in the field of children's literature and picture illustrations, often described as being "tall and handsome, with blue-gray eyes, and light brown hair,"[2] was born in the walled town of Chester, England, on March 22, 1846. He, with his brother, attended the King Henry VII School in the same city. The school records show that he was one of the best boys in the school. From the age of six, he began to draw pictures of animals or modeled in clay and sometimes cut them out of wood.

This talent was discouraged by his father. At the age of fifteen, he was sent to work at a bank at Whitchurch in Shropshire. In this environment, he did enjoy the surrounding countryside. He lived in an old farmhouse just outside of the town and "used to go fishing and shooting, to meets of the hounds, to markets and cattle fairs."[3] Caldecott would absorb the sights and sounds and store up the information in his memory and his sketchbook for future use.

After spending six years in the bank at Whitchurch, he was transferred to the Manchester and Salford Bank in the city of Manchester, where he labored the next five years. His greatest sadness was the fact that he missed the beauty of Shropshire, but he tried to make the best of his surroundings.

He joined the Brasenose Club, an organization for writers and artists, and also took advantage of the School of Art. He was a frequent visitor at the homes of artistic friends, and was able to obtain information regarding things concerned with art.

"He used to wander about the bustling, murky streets of Manchester, sometimes finding himself in queer out-of-the-way quarters, often coming across an odd character, curious bits of antiquity and the like. Whenever the chance came, he

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[2]Stanley J. Kunitz, Editor, Junior Book of Authors, p. 65.

[3]Bertha E. Mahony, Compiler, Illustrators of Children's Books 1744-1945, p. 66.

made short excursions into the adjacent country and took along his sketchbooks on long walks, which were never purposeless."[4]

Kate Greenaway, Walter Crane, and Randolph Caldecott have been looked upon as the founders of the picture-book tradition in English and American children's books. Of the three, Caldecott was the greatest. He brought two outstanding attributes to picture-book making. First, the gift of line, and superb control of line. He could make it move, leap and soar. The line could be sharp, clear or nervous, which would echo and reaffirm every turn of his mind. They could be exact and delicate or robust and vigorous. This lineal quality is basic to every other attribute of the picture book.

Secondly, he had the gift of extending the meaning of the text. He could enhance and enliven it or could play and sport with it in an exuberance born of his own wit and imagination. With series of quick, spontaneous sketches he would intersperse the pages of colored illustrations.[5]

"What sport he has with the old rhymes and songs: the battle between the dogs in Where Are You Going, My Pretty Maid?, which matches the exchanges of words between the milkmaid and the young man who was above her station. Follow the story of the elopement of the dish with the spoon in Hey Diddle Diddle, The Cat and The Fiddle. There is nothing in the old rhyme which says anything about how the parents of the spoon felt at the turn of events, or who the parents were, or what were the subsequent results of it all. But Randolph Caldecott has made it a tale of 'Star-crossed Lovers' as eloquent as lovers."[6]

The Aunt Judy's Magazine, edited by Mrs. Alfred Gatty, published its first issue in May of 1866. Juliana Horatia Gatty Ewing, authoress and sister

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[4]Bertha E. Mahony, Compiler, Illustrators of Children's Books 1744-1945, p. 67.

[5]Edna Johnson, Anthology of Children's Literature, p. 69.

[6]Ibid, p. 69.

of Mrs. Gatty, had many of her stories appear in the pages of Aunt Judy, as did the illustrations of Mr. Caldecott. A semi-comic paper published his first drawings. The paper, Will O' The Wisp, and another, Sphinx, were the source for his initiation into the commercial world. He continued to make drawings, modeling and working for the bank. Although his work at the bank never suffered, some of his business companions spoke of comic stories about "finding sketches of horses and dogs and the like on the back of receipt slips, old envelopes, and the blotter on his desk."[7]

By 1870, he acquired enough connections to enable him to make contributions to the magazine, London Society. As a result of these contributions, he and Mr. Henry Blackburn, the editor, became steadfast and life-long friends.

He made his break with Manchester in 1872, and went to London where he continued his work of illustrating short stories and drawing for magazines. One of his first pictures was "The Quron Hunt", which he sent to the newspaper known as the London Graphic.

In April of 1872, he attended a life class under the direction of Mr. E. J. Poynter of the Royal Academy, and "as this was the turning point in Caldecott's career, it should be recorded that at this time and ever afterwards, Mr. Armstrong, later the Art Director of the South Kensington Museum, was his best friend and counsellor [illegible] had also the advantage and friendship of George du Maurier, M. Dalou, the sculptor, Charles Keene and others."[8]

Through these first sketches Caldecott became acquainted with Mr. Edwin Abbey, the illustrator of English subjects. A newspaper, The Daily Graphic,

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[7]Bertha E. Mahony, Compiler, Illustrators of Children's Books 1744-1945, p. 67.

[8]Ibid, p. 67.

published in New York, accepted other of his drawings and for a while afterwards, he contributed to this newspaper. Those things that Caldecott presented to the London Graphic, he assumed both the title of author and artist. "The ideas were his own and the letterpress which meanders among the pictures was his own, too."[9]

In his work, he had occasion to experiment with various methods for reproducing his materials. For Graphic, he used pen and ink without the help of the wood engraver. However, his more serious and lasting works, those of a more permanent nature, was "put through the regular process, 'being photographed on the block and then passed through the engraver's hands.'"[10]

His drawings bear out a sense of freedom in which he could tell so much with such a minimum of lines. The maxim of Caldecott was: "The fewer the lines, the less error committed. The resulting discipline made him a master of action, pace, mood."[11]

Mr. Caldecott would think long periods and spend many hours of serious study before actually engaging his pen with paper. He found rushing and hurrying as observed in journalistic encounters to be quite distasteful. Never being a strong and healthy specimen, his preference of work was for that which required diligent quiet and study. His commissions of the latter type were becoming more frequent and he was also beginning to complete a number of works in oil and water-color of marsh bird life. He executed several of these pictures in the form of quite decorative panels.

During the summer of 1872, and the two summers following this, Caldecott

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[9]Ibid, p. 69.
[10]Ibid, p. 69.
[11]Edna Johnson, Anthology of Children's Literature, p. 1137.

used a cottage belonging to publisher Blackburn. This studio was located in Buckinghamshire, and was a "loose box fitted up to suit him and here, in the quiet country looking out over the woods and fields, he made the sketches for a selection of chapters out of Washington Irving's Sketch Book, to be called "Old Christmas"--a piece of work quite after his own heart, for he loved the same things about old England and old-time English country life that Irving had reveled in so many years before. These two, who lived a generation apart, had much in common and came together in rare harmony of spirit in "Old Christmas." Washington Irving, in this work, did an almost perfect depiction of the stage-coachman, but Mr. Caldecott's picture of the same subject added a finishing touch which carried to many a reader of "Old Christmas" in the New World a living portrait of a past age, and revealed also the presence of a new illustrator."[12]

As Mr. Caldecott continued his work on "Old Christmas", his style of drawing changed. There was a greater intenseness that was both serious and full, being less sketchy and he steered away from the ludicrous. It was told that the "old man who combined the various offices of gardener, groom and parish clerk at Farnham Royal stood unconsciously for several drawings in "Old Christmas", while remembered nooks and corners and byways in Sussex, Kent and Chester played their part in the background of its pictures."[13]

Mr. Caldecott had sympathy and help in the person of J. D. Cooper, an excellent wood engraver. As part of the forword of this work, Caldecott honors this engraver when he said: "Before [illegible]e rememberance of the good old times, so

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[12]Bertha E. Mahony, Compiler, Illustrators of Children's Books 1744-1945, p. 69
[13]Ibid, p. 70.

fast passing, should have entirely passed away, the present artist, R. Caldecott, and engraver, James D. Cooper, planned to illustrate Washington Irving's "Old Christmas."[14]

Randolph Caldecott's reputation was firmly established in 1876, when the Macmillan Company published Irving's "Old Christmas." It met with immediate deserving success, and as a result he was commissioned to do another of Irving's books, Bracebridge Hall. This work too, met with great success and immediate acceptance.

His picture books established new standards of illustration for children's books. The drawings contain action, joy of living and good fun. His love of animals and the English countryside is reflected in this work. Caldecott captured a great amount of meaning with a minimum of lines.

Upon his return to England in late 1877, or early 1878, he set out upon the work for which he has, and will be best remembered--his picture books. It was really through a contemporary, Edmund Evans, that he was urged to engage in this task. Walter Crane had set a very high standard with his toy books and so, before Caldecott attempted his work, he sought out the advice of Mr. Crane. A most cordial friendship developed between the two, which was quite lasting.

Kate Greenaway, a contemporary author-artist of Caldecott says of him, referring to the about-to-be published Hey Diddle Diddle, "I've been to call on the Caldecotts today....My brother showed me some of his (Caldecott's) new drawings yesterday at Racquet Court. They are so uncommonly clever. The Dish running away with the Spoon--you can't think how much he has made of it. I wish I had such a Mind. I'm feeling very low about my own powers just now, for I have

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[14]Ibid, p. 70.

been looking at the originals for the new Crane book--some of them are literally dreams of beauty."[15]

Close to Caldecott's heart were A Farmer Went Trotting Upon His Grey Mare, John Gilpin's Ride and The Fox Jumped Over the Parson's Gate, with the English springtime bursting forth in the pages of The House That Jack Built, The Farmer's Boy and Come Lasses and Lads.

His special treatment of The Queen of Hearts, A Frog He Would A'Wooing Go, Hey Diddle Diddle and Sing a Song of Sixpence are "all treated in a cozy, homey manner with enough jam tarts, blackbird pies, pots of honey and frosted cakes about to make one's mouth water."[16]

There have really been no other picture books that quite equal the Caldecott picture books. The fine and gentle spirit, the humor, the appeal to young and old alike, engages unsurpassing beauty and action. The original publications sold for a shilling apiece and were published individually with paper covers. In later years, an edition came out in which several of these individual works were bound together producing three books: Picture Book No. 1, Picture Book No. 2, and The Panjandrum Picture Book.

Caldecott succeeded in cleverly incorporating bits and pieces of the surroundings so familiar to him in Whitchurch. It is quite apparent that he was in love with the tower of Malpas Church, for he uses it in no fewer than three of his books: Baby Bunting, The Fox Jumps Over the Parson's Gate and Babes in the Wood. It was also said that one could walk through the main street of Whitchurch merely by opening to page six of his The Great Panjandrum.

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[15]Ibid, p. 72.
[16]Ibid, p. 71.

In speaking of Mr. Caldecott's love of nature and the out-of-doors, and particularly of birds, we should not neglect to mention the "little vellum-bound book called The Owls of Olynn Pelfry. The author bears the initials A. Y. D.; the book bears no date at all, so that it is difficult to know when the drawings were made. It is seldom we find him picturing a fairy, but there is a delightful Fairy Queen in this book, dancing the minuet with a portly old owl."[17]

Randolph Caldecott first met Juliana Horatia Gatty Ewing, of whom we have previously spoken, in London in 1879, while her Jackanapes was "still simmering in her brain."[18] Being a great admirer of Caldecott's works, she wished to engage him in the illustrating of this book. He agreed to make the pictures for Jackanapes and also for her Daddy Darwin's Dovecot, in which he was free to draw birds all he wished. Lob Lie-by-the-Fire, another of Mrs. Ewing's works was illustrated for her by Caldecott, and perhaps many more would have followed had it been ordained for them to have lived longer.

In 1880, at the age of 34, Randolph Caldecott was married in Kent, England, to Marian Brind. For six years they lived together in a house near Seven Oaks. Mr. and Mrs. Caldecott never had any children of their own, but he had numerous friends among the younger set. He would often draw for them and would always answer letters from them. To one young aspiring artist he wrote the following: "I thank you very much for your grand sheet of drawings. I hope you will go on trying and learning to draw. There are many beautiful things waiting to be drawn. Animals, flowers, ... and a few people."[19]

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[17] Ibid, p. 74.
[18] Ibid, p. 74.
[19] "Randolph Caldecott", Compton's Pictured Encyclopedia and Fact Index, Vol. 3, p. 27.

Urged by Sampson Low, a publisher, to illustrate a book about summer travel in the Harz Mountains of Germany, Caldecott accepted the challenge. Besides, he thought the trip might improve his health. Young Caldecott found the suggestion delightful and "here, as in every country he visited in after years, he roamed 'fancy free'."[20]

He loved to question the natives of the countryside and was able too, to study the faces of those being interviewed. The interviews were serious and grave, but they always ended on a note of laughter coming from the natives.

Seven months after he undertook the Harz Mountains project some of his sketches began to appear in the Graphic in London. Mr. Blackburn, the publisher, took some of Caldecott's work to America and Caldecott became known on that continent through the Harper's Monthly Magazine. It was Harper's that made many of the young artists of the day well-known.

During the summer of 1878, Mr. Caldecott and Mr. Blackburn made two trips to Brittany. Caldecott had hoped he would be able to drive a gig through the country on this journey, but because of a change in plans this was impossible. None-the-less, they were on the road and this meant a great deal to Caldecott. Everything they encountered became "food for Caldecott's sketchbook, and Mr. Blackburn anxiously watched him working so feverishly, for he was supposed to be taking this trip mainly for his health."[21]

Of this expedition, Mr. Blackburn writes later: "Apart from the artistic material so abundant everywhere, Caldecott's love of animals and knowledge of them, his interest in everything connected with farming, markets, country life

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[20]Bertha E. Mahony, Illustrators of Children's Books 1744-1945, p. 68.
[21]Ibid, p. 73.

and surroundings, roused him to exertions at Carhaix which none but the most hardy 'special artist' would have attempted.... He made some extraordinarily rapid sketches in colour with the brush direct, without a touch of the pencil or anything to guide him on the paper. Few sketches of this kind exist, excepting rough notes in books but not intended for publication. In the evening the figures in the streets and at the inns had to be noted down."[22]

On Caldecott's tours through the country, his frequent stoppings, combined with his letter writing at these times, produced a habit which he carried the rest of his life. He would illustrate his letters with quaint and humorous drawings. He sent a lively sketch of himself to a friend of his from Dodington which is near Whitchurch, where he was engaged in some of his work. He said of himself: "I feel I owe somebody an apology for staying in the country so long, but don't quite see to whom it is due, so I shall stay two or three days longer, and then I shall indeed hang my harp on a willow tree. It is difficult to screw up the proper amount of courage for leaving the malbkins, the piglets, the foals, the goslings, the calves and the puppies."[23]

The health of this unusually skilled artist began to fail, and he went to the Italian Riviera to regain his powers and strength. However, one fails to see this lessening of strength and vitality because his sketches continued to have the vibrancy and spirit as always, as evidenced in the humorous drawings sent back to the Graphic for publication. These works involved scenes from watering places, resorts and wayside situations. At this time, he was proceeding with sketches for the North Italian Folk, by Mrs. Comyns Carr.

Since Caldecott was still suffering from poor health, it was decided in 1886, that he set out to search for a place in which his health might show some improvement. This time, he was bound for the

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[22] Ibid, p. 74
[23] Ibid, p. 73

United States. Upon his leaving, he made a promise to the London Graphic, that he would produce sketches depicting American Life. However, by the time he arrived in St. Augustine, Florida, his strength had ebbed away and there was little energy left for work. On February 12, 1886, he died of tuberculosis "at the height of his powers and reputation."[24] in a land that was not his true home. He was buried in St. Augustine in Evergreen Cemetery. "One likes to remember Caldecott at the last, not in a foreign country, but in his garden at Kensington with his family and dogs--or, as on another occasion, in Victoria Street, Westminster, when 'to a good old English tune the lasses and lads out of his picture book danced before him, and the fiddler in the costume of the time 'played it wrong'."[25]

In partnership with Edmund Evans, Caldecott had produced seventeen books. Hilda Van Stockum says of Caldecott's books that the "most typically Caldecott, the most typically English, is The Three Jovial Huntsmen (1880). Evans himself says of Caldecott's illustrations that they were "so racy and spontaneous", characterized by "vigorous action...an ebb and flow of perpetual motion."[26]

For more than twenty-five years, The Caldecott Award Medal has been presented for outstanding illustrations in picture books for children, published during the preceding year. A committee composed of twenty-three children's librarians, including five representatives from the American Association of School Librarians, have been involved in this selection. This award is made annually in March. In order to be included in the competition, the following simple rules must be followed: a) the artists must be citizens or residents

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[24]Stanley J. Kunitz, Editor, Junior Book of Authors, p. 65.
[25]Bertha E. Mahony, Compiler, Illustrators of Children's Books 1744-1945, p. 75.
[26]Stanley J. Kunitz, Editor, Junior Book of Authors, p. 64.

of the United States, b) their work must have been published within the past year, c) the work must be the artist's original creation, d) the story should not be as important as the drawings, and e) there are no limits as regards the book's age level or the character of the illustrations.

A banquet is held in June of each year sponsored by the Children's Services Division of the American Library Association. At this time, the Medal is presented to the winning illustrator. Mr. Frederic G. Melcher, the board chairman of Publishers' Weekly Magazine, and the founder of Children's Book Week, was responsible for the establishment of this Medal Award.

The very first award for this category was presented in 1938, at the Kansas City, Missouri, Convention, to Dorothy Lathrop for her illustrations in the book entitled Animals of the Bible.

The Medal itself is gold and on the face of it is a reproduction of Caldecott's original illustration of John Gilpin's Ride from the famous narrative poem The Diverting History of John Gilpin by William Cowper. On the reverse is an illustration of 'four and twenty blackbirds baked in a pie'. The engraving reads "For the most distinguished American picture book for children."[27]

There have been many tributes paid to Randolph Caldecott for his outstanding contributions to the world of children's literature. The following are a few of the many praises to the man and his work.

Austin Dobson spoke of Caldecott's books by saying that his pencil "played the most engaging variations. Who, for example, ever before conceived of Madam Blize as a pawnbroker, because--

> She freely gave to all the poor,
> Who left a pledge behind.

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[27]"Randolph Caldecott", Compton's Pictured Encyclopedia and Fact Index, Vol. 3, p. 24.

And where else had the world been shown the authentic, academic presence, the very 'form and pressure' of the 'Great Panjandrum himself', with the little round button on top?"[28]

It was said of Mr. Caldecott by Leslie Brooke, a famous artist of our time, that "Caldecott is an extreme instance of instinctive drawing."[29] It was truly felt that Mr. Caldecott "let himself go for the children, and all his natural sweetness and gaiety of spirit, all his love of life out-of doors--and particularly the English out-of-doors--are reflected from the pages of the old nursery jingles, full of children and old folks, huntsmen and country characters: Animals abound in them--horses and dogs and birds--the pages are full of action. Was ever so hurly-burly a chase imagined as that instituted by those 'headlong, horn-blowing, cheek-bursting and hopelessly futile Three Jovial Huntsmen?'"[30]

In the memoir, Randolph Caldecott, A Personel Memoir of His Early Art Career, his close and dear friend, Henry Blackburn, speaks of the "charm of his personality, the delight of his friendship."[31]

Another close friend, Frederick Locker-Lampson, said of Caldecott's work in these lines: "It seems to me that Caldecott's art was of a quality that appears about once in a century. It had delightful characteristics most happily blended. He had a delicate fancy, and his humour was racy as it was refined. He had a keen sense of beauty and to sum up all, he had charm."[32]

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[28]Bertha E. Mahony, Compiler, Illustrators of Children's Books 1744-1945, p. 72.
[29]Ibid, p. 71.
[30]Ibid, p. 71.
[31]Ibid, p. 75.
[32]Ibid, p. 75.

There is a memorial plaque erected in the Chester Cathedral in England, in his honor. A large number of his original drawings and sketches are to be found today in the Manchester Art Gallery and the British Museum. In the United States, the Houghton Memorial Library of Harvard University has acquired many of his notebooks, first editions, some personal letters, and a number of his original drawings.

In 1946, as an anniversary memorial on the occasion of the one hundredth anniversary of his birth and the 60th of his death, Mary Gould Davis' Randolph Caldecott was published. This volume included many reproductions of his drawings.

A possible fitting conclusion to this paper, which Caldecott himself might have wished for his name and his fame, is the poem entitled An Epitaph, by Margaret Sackville.

As shining sand-drift
Think of me,
Warm, white and glistening
Near the sea:

Like gold-dust gleaming
Which to-day
Light-blowing sea-winds
Whirl away.

I died so long ago
That none may tell
My name, my place, my labor or my fame:
Thus I sleep well.

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